The dynamic concepts of resistance and collaboration in post-Holocaust remembrance: revisiting the personal narratives of jewish survivors from Romania

Ionescu, Ștefan

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

The Dynamic Concepts of *Resistance* and *Collaboration* in post-Holocaust Remembrance

Revisiting the Personal Narratives of Jewish Survivors from Romania*

ȘTEFAN IONESCU

The concepts of Jewish resistance and collaboration during the Holocaust are among the most debated and controversial issues in Holocaust studies. The scholars and various agents of remembrance who have approached this topic have long debated the meanings of resistance and collaboration. Most particularly, they have focused on the scarcity of armed resistance, the collaboration of Jewish leaders with the Nazis, and the compliance of victims with genocidal policies.

For many years, resistance was equated with armed struggle, while Holocaust victims were mainly regarded as passive and obedient, going like "sheep to the slaughter"[1]. Little attention was paid to the complexity of the historical context and to the social, economic, legal, and political situation of Jews living in Nazi Europe. Within the realm of the Nazi influence, the opportunity for any type of armed resistance was significantly hampered by these factors. Because of these conditions, the majority of the Jewish leadership cooperated or collaborated with the Nazis and their allies[2]. Other important aspects of the Holocaust that contributed to the scarcity of armed resistance, such as the gradual radicalization of Nazi policy and the secrecy around the annihilation process, were greatly downplayed.

---

* I would like to thank Joshua Franklin (Hebrew Union College) and Emily Terrana (Clark University) for their helpful suggestions and detailed comments on earlier drafts of this article.

[1] The members of Zionist youth groups in the Warsaw ghetto were among the first who used this expression to blame the passivity of the Jews towards Nazi persecutions, and to persuade other people in the ghettos to join them in resistance against Nazis. See Michael MARRUS, *Holocaust in History*, University of New England Press, Hanover and London, 1987, pp. 108-109.

[2] Overall, it seems that organized Jewish armed resistance, as such, was not widespread in the Romanian sphere of influence. Rather, Soviet partisan groups – although even their activity was assessed by some historians as "trifling" – managed to maintain a presence in Transnistria's forests, and underground hidings, to harass the occupation authorities and their local collaborators. See for instance Alexander DALLIN, *Odessa, 1941-1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule*, Center for Romanian Studies, Iași, Oxford, Portland, 1998, pp. 228-233; Jean ANCEL, *Transnistria*, Romanian transl. by Dan Mihai Pavelescu et als., vol. II, Atlas, București, 1998, pp. 9-42. See also references to partisans in survivors' recollections, such as Clara OSTFELD, *Lumini și umbre din viața mea*, Romanian transl. by Esdra Alhasid, Multistar, București, 1992, pp. 54-55; Siegfried JAGENDORF, *Minunea de la Moghilev*, Romanian transl. by Marcel Biener, Hasefer, București, 1997, p. 183; Meir TEICH, "The Jewish Self-administration in Ghetto Shargorod", *Yad Vashem Studies*, no. 2, 1958, pp. 247-249 and Sonia PALTY, *Evrei, Treceți Nistrul!*, 2nd ed., Papyrus, Tel Aviv, 1989, pp. 185-186.

In the first decades after WWII, the main approach to the emergent Holocaust historiography and commemoration was to emphasize "heroism" and armed resistance. The historical reconstructions and the remembrance process seem to have required a particular emotional approach through the use of heroic images of the past and pious rituals of commemoration. Remembering the Holocaust represented a key step in the process of facing a traumatic past after such an "eclipse of humanity". Decades later, the perspective of the Holocaust began to change, and new interpretations enlarging the concept of resistance have since emerged. In addition to armed resistance, other types of Jewish responses were identified and popularized, thus broadening the understanding of resistance.

Resistance is often discussed together with another concept with which it is closely interlinked – collaboration. The issue of Jewish collaboration with the Nazis has also triggered heated debates, most known for example, are those caused by Raul Hilberg's *Destruction of the European Jews,* and Hanna Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*[1]. Emphasizing the scarcity of armed resistance, these authors pointed out the contribution of Jewish collaborators – especially Jewish Councils/*Judenrate* members – to the efficient and orderly implementation of the "Final Solution".

Decades later, the concept of collaboration has also benefited from a more distant perspective; through changing social and political contexts, new interpretations focusing on the difficulties and moral dilemmas faced by Jewish leadership have started to emerge.

It is particularly interesting how the notions of resistance and collaboration have been represented and reinterpreted in the aftermath of WWII. These various reinterpretations were not to be found only among politicians, historians, or Holocaust deniers. The survivors also had agency; they, too, reinterpreted the past, particularly the sensitive aspects, such as those related to resistance and collaboration. How exactly did the survivors represent the notions of Holocaust resistance and collaboration in the aftermath of WWII? More specifically, how did the concepts of resistance and collaboration evolve, and how did the survivors reinterpret them in the decades that followed the event?

Through the examination of personal narratives produced by Holocaust survivors from Romania, I will attempt to answer these questions. Diaries, memoirs, and other autobiographical narratives are extremely relevant for understanding the post-WWII interests and concerns of survivors, including those regarding resistance and collaboration. Overall, the treatment of the Holocaust in post-WWII public opinion, commemoration and scholarship appears to have influenced the way survivors remembered the Holocaust, specifically regarding the themes of resistance and collaboration. This feature is clearly identifiable, especially in the autobiographical narratives of Holocaust survivors who emigrated from Romania, living far away from ubiquitous communist censorship. First, I will investigate the presence of resistance and collaboration in the diaries of the Jewish survivors from Romania. I will then analyze how these notions were treated in subsequent memoirs and other autobiographical accounts. I will begin with some preliminary considerations regarding the status of Holocaust remembrance. This will be followed by discussion of resistance and collaboration during the communist epoch, and then I will focus on the evolution of these two notions in post-Holocaust survivors' narratives.

---

[1] See Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Quadrangle, Chicago, 1961 and Hannah ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Viking, New York, 1963.

From the first years after WWII until the consolidation of the communist regime, in Romania there was an era of turmoil and relative uncertainty concerning the future that allowed some degree of freedom in the public sphere. Corresponding to the regime's goals of implementing retributive political justice, some accounts of Jewish suffering during WWII could be published. After their consolidation of power, however, the policy of the communist regime towards the Holocaust silenced the Jewish identity of the victims. For instance, the local communist party section/branch tried to prevent the public remembrance in 1945 of the Iași pogrom[1]. According to the communist vision and discourse, the numerous victims of fascist atrocities were peaceful Soviet (and Romanian) citizens and anti-fascist militants[2]. Aspiring to gain the monopoly of anti-fascist resistance and martyrdom, the communists discouraged any attempts at remembrance and commemoration that might have undermined their alleged prestige and higher morality as the primary "victims of fascism", and thus encouraged silence concerning the Jewishness of the main victims of Nazism/Fascism[3]. While monopolizing *resistance* for their own party members, the communists implemented and publicized retribution against real and imaginary fascist perpetrators and collaborators. In this way, the communist regime managed to discredit and imprison some of their democratic political opponents, as well as former Jewish "collaborationists" of the Antonescu regime. Survivors began to be mentioned as victims of the Nazis, gradually, in the 1960s, but ambiguity still covered the Jewish identity of the victims[4].

In communist Romania, public remembrance was determined by the regime. The dissemination of Jewish survivors' accounts into the public sphere during this period was conditioned by political decisions of the Party's leaders and official censorship. This factor greatly influenced the way in which Jewish survivors wrote and published their personal narratives. For instance, certain themes, such as post-war anti-Semitism and the involvement of Romanian authorities in the perpetration of the Holocaust on the Eastern Front, were either considered taboo subjects, or permissible only to certain "chosen" persons. The main purpose of this censorship was to limit the responsibility for the persecution and killings of the Jews to the Nazis and their collaborators. The allocation of responsibility was thus mandated only towards the "non-representative" elements within the local, mainly democratic and anti-fascist societies, or to aggressive neighbors, such as Hungary[5]. The contributions of

---

[1] Liviu ROTMAN, "Memory of the Holocaust in Communist Romania: from Minimization to Oblivion", in Mihai IONESCU, Liviu ROTMAN (eds.), *The Holocaust in Romania: History and Significance*, ISPAIM, Goren Goldstein Diaspora Research Center/Tel Aviv University, Goren Goldstein Center for Hebrew Studies, University of Bucharest, București and Tel Aviv, 2003, p. 206.

[2] Mihai CHIOVEANU, "The Holocaust, the Europeans' Memory and History Writing in the Postwar Era", *Studia Hebraica*, no. 4, 2004, p. 157; Victor ESKENASY, "The Holocaust and Romanian Historiography: Communist and Neo-Communist Revisionism", in Randolph BRAHAM (ed.), *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, pp. 180-182.

[3] For more details, see Mihai CHIOVEANU, "The Holocaust…cit.", pp. 156-157; see also François FURET, *Trecutul unei iluzii. Eseu despre ideea comunistă în secolul XX*, Romanian transl. by Emanoil Marcu and Vlad Russo, Humanitas, București, 1996, p. 417. There were, of course, exceptions when the historians from communist Romania did mention Jews as victims and Transnistria as the deportation area used by Antonescu regime. See Victor ESKENASY, "The Holocaust and Romanian Historiography…cit.", pp. 182-183.

[4] Victor ESKENASY, "The Holocaust and Romanian Historiography…cit.", pp. 180-183.

[5] For an analysis of the presence – or rather absence – of Jews as Holocaust victims in Romanian communist historiography, see *Ibidem*, pp. 173-194.

Nazi Germany and "fascist Horthyist" Hungary to the annihilation of the Jews were especially emphasized during the national stage of the communist regime[1]. The Romanian public, thus, had the opportunity to read numerous accounts describing the torments of Jews under Nazi authority[2]. While many accounts of survivors who suffered in German and Hungarian camps and ghettos were published, many of the stories of Jews from Bessarabia, Bucovina, and Transnistria were silenced[3].

After the war, the Jewish survivors liberated from Transnistria frequently became the object of suspicion to the new authorities. Their survival from camps, ghettos and mass-execution episodes transformed some of the survivors into suspects – possible fascist collaborators – in the eyes of the communist officials. "How did you manage to escape?" one Jewish survivor, a devoted Party member, was asked repeatedly by a suspicious employee of the "cadres" section of the Romanian Communist Party[4]. As a result of this suspicion, and in order to escape accusations of collaboration, some survivors neither spoke publicly nor wrote about their fate under the Nazi/Fascist occupation, or became extremely reluctant to do so. There are cases of survivors even changing their identification data – name, place, and birth date – in order to avoid accusations of surviving by collaboration with the "fascists"[5]. Accusations of collaboration with the Antonescu regime were a serious threat, as proven by the post-1945 criminal justice process, the People's Courts, and the subsequent trials. These were implemented to try the people of the former regime connected one way or another with WWII persecutions and atrocities, and included several Jewish collaborationists, such as Matias Grunberg, Grossman Grozea, and Jack Leon[6]. Mainly because of this looming fear some Jewish survivors began to present heroic credentials about their life under the Antonescu regime[7]. The majority of survivors, however, simply remained silent during the postwar years because they wanted to forget the past atrocities,

---

[1] Thus, the tragedy of the Jews of Northern Transylvania – under Hungarian administration during WWII – provided a useful argument for the national-communist regime of Romania in the old political dispute over Transylvania. In contrast, Romania during WWII was described as a safe haven for the persecuted European Jews. For more details, see Randolph BRAHAM, *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust*, East European Monographs, Boulder, 1998, pp. 37-53.

[2] See for instance Simon MAGDA, *Pe marea bandă rulantă*, Editura pentru Literatură (henceforward EPL), București, 1969; Iosif MICU, *Am supraviețuit lagărului hitlerist*, EPL, București, 1970; Elie WIESEL, *Noaptea, Porțile pădurii*, Romanian transl. by Bianca Zamfirescu, Univers, București, 1989; Oliver LUSTIG, *Viața in imperiul morții*, EPL, București, 1969; Jorge SEMPRUN, *Marea Călătorie*, Romanian transl. by A. E. Baconsky, Editura pentru Literatură Universală, București, 1964; Germaine TILLION, *Ravensbruck*, Romanian transl. by Sanda Mihăescu-Boroianu, Editura Politică, București, 1979.

[3] There were very few exceptions from this trend. See Victor ESKENASY, "The Holocaust and Romanian Historiography…cit.".

[4] See Matei GALL, *Eclipsa*, Du Style, București, 1997, p. 312. For more details, see the observations of a contemporary historian on this case, Liviu ROTMAN, *Evreii din România în perioada comunistă 1944-1965*, Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 19. See also Arnold BUXBAUM, "The Miracle of Our Survival", in Felicia STEIGMAN CARMELLY (ed.), *Shattered! 50 Years of Silence: History and Voice of the Tragedy in Romania and Transnistria*, Abbeyfield Publishers, Scarborough, 1997, p. 211.

[5] See for instance, Tatyana GUTMAN, "The Fugitive", in Felicia STEIGMAN CARMELLY (ed.), *Shattered!*...cit., p. 256.

[6] For the postwar trials, see Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania – Final Report*, Polirom, Iași, 2005, pp. 313-331.

[7] See for instance Tatyana GUTMAN, "The Fugitive", cit., p. 256; also Meir TEICH, "The Jewish Self-administration…cit.", pp. 253-254.

and because of the fear that the people would neither understand nor believe their horrific experiences[1].

Nevertheless, even in the first post-war years, some survivors' narratives did gradually become public. In scrutinizing the first narratives of Holocaust survivors – their diaries produced during and after the collapse of the Antonescu regime – it is important to note that the theme of Jewish armed resistance is rarely mentioned. This theme was not emphasized as topic of major interest in diaries written by survivors such as Arnold Dagani or Miriam Bercovici[2]. These diaries were written during the war years, a time when Jewish armed resistance did not enter into mainstream discourse on the Holocaust as a relevant feature of the Jewish response to the persecutions. The diarists did not present armed resistance as their main concern. Their mere survival, escape, and return home seemed to be the main forms of resistance they wished to emphasize. Some Jewish diarists merely referred to rumors about partisan or underground activity. Maria Banuș, for example, wrote about the communist underground group she was part of, but she did not mention her involvement in any heroic armed resistance[3]. Romanian Jewish diarists wrote mainly about anti-Semitic persecution, murder, fear, hunger, exhausting and humiliating forced labor, and not about armed resistance.

Memoirs and autobiographical material are also extremely relevant for understanding the post-war evolution of resistance and collaboration concepts. Being recorded after the events, and thus allowing the author more time for reflection, they are extremely useful for revealing the meanings survivors gave to their experiences, the way they chose to remember, and what they chose to remember[4]. A characteristic trend of the first post-war autobiographical narratives of the Holocaust survivors was an increased attention to Jewish heroism and "glorious armed resistance", corresponding to a similar evolution in the paradigm of Holocaust scholarship and commemoration[5]. Jewish armed resistance was most strongly emphasized in the mainstream discourse of the Yishuv (Jewish political establishment in

---

[1] For cases of survivors who have been disbelieved when narrated WWII Holocaust experiences, see Joil ALPERN, *No One Awaiting For Me,* University of Calgary Press, Calgary, 2001, p. 239; Aharon APPELFELD, *Story of a Life*, Schoken Books, New York, 2004, p. 80; Hedi FRIED, *Drumul la și de la Auschwitz*, Romanian transl. by Zitta and Raul Herșcovici, Romania Press, București, 2002, p. 180; Ruth GLASBERG GOLD, *Timpul lacrimilor secate*, Romanian transl. by Cătălin Patrosie and Eugen Hriscu, Hasefer, București, 2003, p. 316; Rubin UDLER, *The Cursed Years*, Tipografia Centrală, Chișinău, 2005, pp. 168, 207; Matei GALL, *Eclipsa*, cit., p. 238.

[2] Dagani mentioned that the locals who helped him escape from Mihailovka camp offered to hide him in the forest. Dagani, thinking that going to the forest might have meant joining the partisans, rejected this idea. Instead he preferred to escape the camp, at that time in German administrated Reichskommissariat Ukraine, and return to Transnistria. Arnold DAGANI, *Groapa e în livada cu vișini*, 2nd ed., Hasefer, București, 2004, p. 161. See also Miriam KORBER BERCOVICI, *Jurnal de Ghetou: Djurin, Transnistria 1941-1943*, Kriterion, București, 1995.

[3] See Maria BANUȘ, *Sub Camuflaj: Jurnal*, Cartea Românească, București, 1978, pp. 148-149, 255, 323-327. She mentioned activities such as meetings, depositing leaflets, and hosting communist underground members.

[4] For some relevant examples of survivors whose memoirs mentioned the problematic aspects of their recollections, such as the willingly avoidance and selectiveness of certain episodes of their Holocaust experience see Itzhak ARTZI, *Biografia unui sionist*, Romanian transl. by Smoia Avny, Hasefer, București, 1999, p. 11; Tereza MOZES, *Decalog însângerat*, ARA, București, 1995, p. 156.

[5] For the evolution of the armed resistance concept, see Robert ROZETT, "Jewish Resistance", in Dan STONE (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2004, pp. 341-363. See also Yehuda BAUER, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, Yale University

Palestine before 1948) during the time of the war, and in the subsequent years during Israeli statehood. The same trend can be observed in Jewish communities in the Diaspora, under the growing international influence of Zionism. For the Zionist master narrative, legitimate Jewish behavior during the Holocaust was reflected only in the heroic example of the ghetto fighters. These fighters were depicted as "Zionists in Diaspora", European heroic equivalents of the Zionist fighters. In comparison, other Jewish victims, who Zionists in the Yishuv viewed as passive, were described as dying like sheep in the slaughter house[1].

Consequently, survivors' accounts written and published soon after the war reflected the underlying theme of armed resistance and collaboration with the partisans. Many Jews, particularly those with Zionist sympathies viewed this type of Jewish behavior as having the most merit. Miklos Nyiszli, for example, a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, wrote and published his book soon after his return from deportation[2]. He paid significant attention to the heroic uprising of *Sonderkommando* underground members, who managed to destroy some of the crematorium while fighting with the guards and trying to escape from the camp[3]. Meir Teich's narrative also seems to be part of this first decades' trend: he was one of the first Romanian Jewish survivors who underlined his secret activity in the support of Soviet partisans as a form of resistance[4].

The issue of resistance against the Nazi/Fascist persecutors is closely connected with issues of cooperation and collaboration[5]. Because of the complex historical context and the lack of moral choices that victims struggled with, it is not easy to judge clearly and draw objective conclusions about the behavior of Jews under such extreme duress during WWII. The understandable nature of this behavior is what Primo Levi has called *The Grey Zone*[6]. Distinguishing resistance from cooperation and collaboration was indeed a very complicated process, open to biases and counter-interpretations. Particularly complex was the situation of those involved in the Jewish Councils, ghetto police, or other positions of authority that required them to maintain constant relations with local officials. It seems that one way to classify "collaborators" and "cooperators" objectively is to evaluate whether Jews in power positions used their authority to protect and pursue personal interests rather than those of the community[7]. Collaborators, it seems,

---

Press, New Haven, 2000, pp. 119-142; Michael MARRUS, *Holocaust in History*, cit., chapter 7 "Jewish Resistance", pp. 133-155.

[1] See Robert ROZETT, "Jewish Resistance", cit., pp. 341-342; Michael MARRUS, *Holocaust in History*, cit., pp. 108-109.

[2] The first edition (in Hungarian) of the memoirs of Miklosz NYISZLI, *Dr. Mengele boncoloorvosa voltam az Auschwitz-I krematoriumban*, Grafica Nyomdaipari Vallalat, Nagyvarad, was published in 1946, in Oradea.

[3] Miklos NYISZLI, *Am fost medic la Auschwitz: Laboratorul și crematoriul dr. Mengele*, Romanian transl. by Cecilia Fodor, 3rd edition, Aquila 93, Oradea, 1998, pp. 140-142, 172-188.

[4] See Meir TEICH, "The Jewish Self-administration…cit.", pp. 247-254.

[5] For more details, see Dan MICHMAN, *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective*, Mitchell Valentine, London, 2003, pp. 217-248.

[6] See Primo LEVI, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Vintage International, New York, 1989, pp. 36-69. The same situation can be described as "choiceless choice". See Lawrence L. LANGER, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps", *Centerpoint: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, no. 1, Fall 1980, pp. 53-59.

[7] See Joshua FRANKLIN, *Tell No One: Leo Baeck and the Terrible Secret*, Unpublished MA Thesis, Clark University, Department of History, 2007, pp. 93-96.

generally tended to set their personal priorities over those of the community that they served. In these cases, inevitable cooperation would become a problematic attitude of collaboration, under a much darker shade of grey. Still, because of the intricate nature of these issues, this standard can be difficult to assess. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the Jewish Councils' members were stigmatized as Nazi collaborators, and were blamed for betraying the Jewish people[1]. The scholarship written in that period followed the same perspective and triggered many debates[2]. Starting in the 1960s, historians became inclined to pay greater attention to the dilemmas faced by the leaders of the Jewish Councils, beginning to acknowledge the difficulty of the situation as well as the variety of Jewish responses, including different types of resistance[3].

It is logical that the Jewish leaders who cooperated or collaborated with the persecutors during WWII, and who mentioned those issues in its aftermath, would try to explain and justify the motivations for their choices. They emphasized external pressure as influential in the decisions of people trying to cope with the life during the Nazi/Fascists. They also stressed the resistance character of their activity. Sometimes, the former Jewish leaders had to flee their country in order to escape the threats of various post-war political justice procedures. There are several relevant cases in the history of Romanian Jewish leaders – Meir Teich (arrested and investigated by NKVD), Siegfried Jagendorf (fleeing post-war Romania, apparently fearing a potential trial), Alexandru Șafran (fleeing Romania in 1947), and Wilhelm Fielderman (fleeing Romania in 1948, fearing a potential arrest) – who wrote accounts of that era and deserve a closer scrutiny.

Meir Teich, head of the *Judenrate* in Shargorod during the war and formal chief "collaborationist" with the occupation authorities, wrote his account in the 1950s. His version of WWII events was published in Israel, in *Yad Vashem Studies*, the journal of the *Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority* – an institution that set the agenda for Holocaust remembrance and scholarship in Israel[4]. Teich's account emphasized his secret collaboration with Soviet partisans, the help he offered them, and the plan for the joint defense of the Shargorod ghetto in "case of emergency"[5]. After the liberation by the Red Army, Mr Teich was arrested and investigated by the NKVD, and kept in a Soviet prison for more than six months. His narrative seems to indicate an effort to negate the accusations of having collaborated with the Nazis/Fascists. Teich emphasized the positive results of his leadership, and the potential negative ones if he had refused to collaborate with the occupation authorities. At the same time, he argued that, by choosing such (double) behavior, he was able to successfully cooperate with the partisans. To increase

---

[1] See Dan MICHMAN, "Jewish Leadership in Extremis", in Dan STONE (ed.), *Historiography of the Holocaust*, cit., pp. 319-321; Michael MARRUS, *Holocaust in History*, cit., pp. 108-112.

[2] See Raul HILBERG's *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., and Hanna ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*…cit.

[3] Relevant for this new trend are studies such as, Isaiah TRUNK, *Judenrat*, Macmillan, New York, 1972, and Aharon WEISS, "Jewish Leadership in Occupied Poland: Postures and Attitudes", *Yad Vashem Studies*, no. 12, 1977, pp. 335-366. These authors examined the actions of Jewish Councils leaders. See also Michael MARRUS, *Holocaust in History*, cit., pp. 112-116, and Yehuda BAUER, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, cit., pp. 128-136.

[4] Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, was established in 1953.

[5] See Meir TEICH, "The Jewish Self-administration…cit.", pp. 247-249.

his credibility, Teich reproduced in the published narrative two certificates of *bona fide*, given to him by the local authorities and partisan units. These documents attested to his helpful conduct towards the partisans and the local population[1].

Teich's effort resembles that of another important leader of the deported Jews, Siegfried Jagendorf. Jagendorf, too, insisted that his collaboration with the persecutors was aimed solely at saving the Jewish deportees by making them useful workers, and thus less expendable for the Romanian authorities. Moreover, Jagendorf argued, he did not try to accumulate personal power or take advantage of his position. Jagendorf, a Jewish engineer from Rădăuți, played an important role in the life of deported Jews in Transnistria. He managed to restore a foundry and a factory in the town of Moghilev, employing mainly Jewish deportees, and thus allowing them to stay in Moghilev as indispensable, "productive" workers. His initiative provided jobs, shelter, and food for thousands of Jewish workers and their families, who otherwise would have been deported further East and would have probably perished from hunger, exposure, disease, or mass-execution. In the Moghilev ghetto, Jangendorf also established several vital welfare institutions, which enabled the survival of the most endangered deportees: hospitals, an orphanage, and a refectory for the poor. However, as the most influential person in Moghilev ghetto, he accumulated significant personal power and a privileged position[2]. This, together with his authoritarian and uncompromising style of leadership, attracted criticism from several deportees[3].

Jagendorf started to write his memoirs in 1956 and finished them approximately 10 years later. He chose a boastful title for his manuscript, *Jagendorf: My Account of WWII – The True Story of How 100,000 Sons of my People Were Saved*. Jagendorf tried to donate to Yad Vashem, the Jewish Council archive he appropriated when he fled Moghilev, under the condition that his memoirs would be published in the form in which they were written. When the Israeli institution did not accept this condition, Jagendorf withdrew his offer[4]. The entire book is marked by a constant emphasize on his resistance against Romanian occupation authorities, in an effort to save the Jews from Transnistria. Apparently, this was the result of his fear of indictment as a fascist collaborator by the communist authorities, an eventuality against which he took his own defensive measures before the liberation[5]. Like

---

[1] *Ibidem*, pp. 253-254. Both "certificates of character" attests his help for the partisans with information, medicines, money, and transportation, as well as by saving the lives of several local Jews and orphans.

[2] Running Moghilev foundry with an iron hand, Jagendorf benefited from several privileges. He had two personal guards that prevented the Moghilev Jews from approaching him, and in front of his door there was a secretary who removed the petitioners. But what enraged the survivors was that Jagendorf and his wife repatriated to Romania in March 1944, abandoning Moghilev without noticing nor saying good bye to the foundry's personal, leaving many of the Jewish workers "angry and shocked to find out that their leader left them in an extremely dangerous moment", according to Max Schmidt's testimony. Other former deportees complained that Jagendorf behaved as a dictator and despot. See Siegfried JAGENDORF, *Minunea*…cit., pp. 182, 188.

[3] For an example of this criticism see the testimony of Max Schmidt in *ibidem*, pp. 119-121. An explanation of that criticism might be that some of the survivors/critics' hostility might have been motivated by the harsh punishments Jagendorf gave them for theft and other illegal activities that flourished among the starved workers.

[4] In the end, the archive and memoirs' manuscript ended up in Yad Vashem after his death, a decade later.

[5] Repatriating to Romania, Jagendorf stole the documents/files of the Jewish Council of Moghilev Ghetto. He was never officially indicted by the People's Tribunal as part of post-war

many others, his case is illustrative of the fact that concepts such as cooperation, collaboration, and resistance during a complex historical event like WWII are not always clearly distinguishable.

For several decades, Wilhelm Filderman was the leader of the local Jewish community and of a Romanian Jewish party that advocated assimilation. Although during WWII he lost his official position, even being deported for a short while to Transnistria, Filderman enjoyed a certain influence among Romanian non-Jewish elites, as the unofficial representative of the Romanian Jewish community on whose behalf he constantly intervened. After the collapse of the Antonescu regime and the consolidation of communist power, Filderman's position weakened. He was an advocate for a parliamentary liberal democracy, and opposed the absorption of Jewish political organizations into the communist "popular front". During the first post war years, Filderman was harassed by the newly consolidated communist authorities, and by the local branch of Jewish Democratic Committee, which saw him as the representative of bourgeoisie/capitalist trend among local Jews. Afraid that he might be arrested, Filderman fled Romania for France at the beginning of 1948. Writing in exile, Filderman finished his memoirs by 1956, which represent a history of Romanian anti-Semitism. Filderman especially emphasized his decade-long personal struggle defending the rights of the local Jewish community[1]. Concerning the period of WWII, Filderman felt the need to point out that, while in Paris in 1939, he gave up the possibility of relocation to US for the duration of the war. Filderman decided that he could not abandon his coreligionists, and should keep struggling for their defense[2].

Another leader of the WWII Jewish community was Alexandru Șafran, the Chief Rabbi of Romania between 1940 and 1947. During the war, Șafran continuously intervened on behalf of local Jews. In the post-war context, dominated by the emergence of communist power attempting to control all spheres of society and suspicion for people who had any position of authority under the previous non-communist regimes, Șafran had to flee Romania in 1947. In his memoirs, written and published in 1980s, Șafran argues that the communist regime, which "marked the brutal end of the autonomy of the Jewish communities of Romania", forced him to leave the country through various harassments and threats[3]. The main themes of his memoirs, entitled *Resisting the Storm*, are his resistance against both the Antonescu regime's persecutory policies against the Jews, and the communist regime's interference, emphasizing his tireless efforts to rescue his coreligionists from various persecutions.

Returning to the evolution of Jewish resistance, one can note that decades after the initial narrow and restrictive concept, *resistance* changed and become broader, encompassing other forms of non-armed resistance under a new term,

---

retributive justice administrated by the communists, but it seems that he was asked to defend himself from survivors' accusations in front of a secret Jewish "court of honor". The lawyer Jagendorf hired – Jean Cohen – did not have the chance to defend him because Jagendorf fled from Romania to the US. Later, using the archive he appropriated in Moghilev, Jagendorf sued West Germany for compensations. *Ibidem*, p. 186.

[1] See Wilhelm FILDERMAN, *Memoirs and Diaries*. vol. I, Tel Aviv University and Yad Vashem, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, 2004. So far, only the first volume of his memoirs, covering the years 1900-1940, has been published.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 507.

[3] See Alexandre SAFRAN, *Resisting the Storm*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1987, p. 11.

the Hebrew *amidah*. This Jewish response to the Holocaust, signifies "resistance" but also "standing"[1]. The new enlarged concept of "Jewish resistance"[2] to the Holocaust encompassed a broad variety of activities: not just armed resistance, but also spiritual resistance, opposition to the persecutors, food smuggling, rescue missions, and even actual survival itself[3]. By the 1970s, the new broadened concept of *amidah* replaced armed resistance in Israeli discourse on the Holocaust and increasingly influenced the Diaspora discourses as well.

As such, survivors' narratives written in the 1970s and 1980s began to pay more attention to themes that included the broadened concept of Jewish resistance, rather than focusing primarily on collaboration with the partisans or armed fighting against the persecutors. Following the historiographical, commemorative, and public opinion trend of including rescue activities into the Jewish response to Holocaust, most survivors' accounts written in the 1980s included topics which related to the broadened concept of resistance[4]. Besides rescue, community cohesion and moral resistance are often encountered in the writings of the survivors published since the 1980s, such as those of Leo Schadach, Ostfeld, Eugen Luca, Sonia Palty, Artzi, Buium Benjamini and Moscovici. For instance, a line from Leo Schadach's narrative concerning the period of deportation in a Transnistrian ghetto demonstrates for the changing meaning of resistance: "Our morale and resistance should not drop; our resistance should not give up, this is now essential"[5].

Survivors' memoirs written in the 1990s continued to broaden the concept of Jewish resistance[6]. For instance, Rudolph Tessler pleaded that an increased emphasis be placed on moral and spiritual resistance in discourses dealing with Jewish

---

[1] *Amidah* – meaning both resistance and standing – is a concept that emerged in the late 1960s and replaced the notion of Jewish (armed) resistance that played such as important role in Israel in the first decades after the war. For more details on the evolution of *amidah*, see Robert ROZETT, "Jewish Resistance", cit., pp. 345-347, and Yehuda BAUER, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, cit., pp. 119-166.

[2] The trend towards a broad concept of resistance – *amidah* – part of the Jewish response/stand during the Holocaust is exemplified by two major conferences hosted by Yad Vashem – on Jewish resistance (1970) and on the rescue attempts (1977), which become reference moments for the evolution of the Israeli Holocaust Historiography. See Raphael VAGO, "The Concept of Resistance and Heroism in Israeli Historiography and Public Opinion", *Studia Iudaica*, vol. X, 2001, pp. 146-170; see also the subchapter "Rescue as resistance" from Robert ROZETT, "Jewish Resistance", cit., pp. 353-356.

[3] Writing few years ago, Yehuda Bauer considered that *amidah* "includes smuggling food into ghettos; mutual self-sacrifice within the family to avoid starvation or worse; cultural, educational, religious and political activities taken to strengthen morale; the work of doctors, nurses, and educators to consciously maintain health and moral fiber to enable individual and group survival; and of course armed rebellion or the use of force (with bare hands or with 'cold' weapons) against the Germans and their collaborators". Yehuda BAUER, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, cit., p. 120.

[4] See the memoirs of Eugen LUCA, *Pogrom*, Tel Aviv, 1989; Leo SCHADACH, *Orășelul pierdut*, Kriterion, București, 1996; Sonia PALTY, Alexandru ȘAFRAN, Clara OSTFELD, Ruth GLASBERG, Joil ALPERN, Avigdor SCHACHAN, *Burning Ice: The Ghettos of Transnistria*, East European Monographs, Boulder, 1996; Rosza GOTTLIEB, *Katita, Prințesa Ghetoului*, Romanian transl. by Maria Vera Willinger, Glycon & Fortuna, București, 2003.

[5] Leo SCHADACH, *Orășelul*…cit., p.144. In his memoirs Schadach often mentioned the need for maintaining the high moral of the deportees. See also *ibidem*, pp. 147, 148.

[6] For recent historical studies on the broadened resistance of Romanian Jews, see Lya BENJAMIN, *Prigoană și rezistență în istoria evreilor din România: 1940-1944*, Hasefer, București, 2001; Iaacov GELLER, *Rezistența spirituală a evreilor români în timpul Holocaustului,* Hasefer, București, 2004.

responses to the Holocaust. Tessler criticizes books that underline physical sufferings and armed heroism while minimizing other response; he considers this approach erroneous[1]. Benditer Ihiel, a survivor of Vapnarka camp in Transnistria designated mainly for communists of Jewish origin, deals considerably with non-armed Jewish responses such as compassion, strikes, fighting disease, and spreading positive news[2]. One subchapter of his memoirs, re-published in a 1997 collection of testimonies, bears the name, "Other forms of Resistance", and is devoted to the spiritual activities of the deportees. According to Benditer, it seems that even communist activists observed some of the Jewish traditions performed in the camp: reading Yiddish poetry, celebrating religious holidays through theatre (Purim spiel), fasting, and reading prayers and psalms from the Hagadah at Passover[3].

Other survivors of Transnistria writing in 1990s felt obliged to discuss the sensitive and controversial issue of the lack of Jewish armed resistance during the Holocaust[4]. At the end of a collection of testimonies published by a Transnistria survivors' association, one can find a chapter devoted to a major trend in the Holocaust historiography of the most recent decades, namely the impact of the Holocaust on the "Second and Third Generations"[5]. Written by a survivor's daughter and bearing the title "Perspective of a Child of a Survivor on Resistance", the chapter emphasizes non-violent Jewish resistance. Her contribution aims to explain the scarcity of Jewish armed resistance, and to underline the individual and collective acts of non-violent resistance, which should be considered heroic under the epoch's circumstances[6].

This trend of emphasizing the Jewish response and Jewish life under Nazi rule followed a shift in the concept of resistance during the Holocaust. In cases where there was no armed resistance, other forms were uncovered. In this way, the embarrassing image of the "passivity of the victims" encountered in the first decades after WWII did not overwhelm those who endured the deportation and escaped alive. However, this identifiable trend in survivors' narratives did not imply that they no longer valued armed resistance, a response that continued to be proudly invoked in their accounts only that the meaning of resistance had broadened[7].

By claiming to be resistors and not passive victims, many survivors were able to regain their self-respect. The pride and the boost of self-esteem in the accounts of those few who were truly "active" resistors, contributing to the defeat of their

---

[1] Such as "moral and spiritual strength". See Rudolph TESSLER, *Letter to my Children*, University of Missouri Press, 1999, p. x.

[2] See excerpts of Ihiel Benditer's memoirs in Felicia STEIGMAN CARMELLY (ed.), *Shattered!*...cit., pp. 181-202.

[3] *Ibidem*, pp. 196-197. The titles of his two other subchapters are related to resistance.

[4] See Joil ALPERN, *No One Awaiting…cit*., p. 235; also Nicolae Berhau's testimony in *Holocaustul evreilor români: din mărturiile supraviețuitorilor*, Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 292; Rubin UDLER, *The Cursed Years*, cit., pp. 168-207; Tereza MOZES, *Decalog însângerat*, cit., pp. 48-49.

[5] Marion HOFFER, "Perspective of a Child of a Survivor on Resistance", in Felicia STEIGMAN CARMELLY (ed.), *Shattered!*...cit., pp. 444-453.

[6] *Ibidem*, pp. 446-453.

[7] The armed resistance is still present in survivors' accounts written and published in 1980s and 1990s. For instance, Leo Schadach who wrote in the 1980s, mentioned armed resistance together with the moral resistance, Jewish stand. See Leo SCHADACH, *Orășelul*…cit., pp. 144, 156, 163; also Sonia Palty, who wrote at the beginning of the 1980s, also mentioned the theme of armed resistance, but she emphasized the other features of *amidah* – moral and material help, strong solidarity and group cohesion between the deportees. Sonia PALTY, *Evrei*…cit., pp. 42, 68-69, 94, 131-134, 195-196, 213-214.

former oppressors with weapons in their hands, is obvious in their narratives. For instance, one former deportee from Transnistria, depicting the episode when he contributed, alongside the partisans, to the liberation of his ghetto, wrote:

> "I squeezed the rifle near my chest like a bride; the rifle was my bride and the approaching artillery sound was my nuptial music […] I started to shoot without any pause and while my hand did not tremble anymore, my lips whispered: for my father, for Seindala, for Reizala, for Tania […], for all"[1].

Through their actions, these imaginary and/or real resistors – either through arms or peaceful means – were no longer part of the category of survivors with a depreciative image among Israelis in the first post-war decade. They could now claim to be equivalent with the heroic Jews – the Israelis. Consequently, this development facilitated an easier integration into the larger community, especially for survivors who settled in Israel. Thus, the fracture and cleavages existent in the first post-war decades between various groups of Israeli inhabitants, particularly the *Sabra*[2] and the survivors who emigrated from Europe, has been gradually bridged[3]. In the accounts produced by many of those who have immigrated to Israel, the rhetoric of resistance, including armed struggle, became a leitmotif of their autobiographical writings. Those who could claim a background of resistance during WWII did so, gaining a source of personal pride and self-value/identity after a long period of humiliations and personal defeat.

One of the most debated chapters of the Holocaust, Jewish resistance and collaboration, was gradually institutionalized in the aftermath of the Holocaust and became part of the pious rituals of commemoration, embracing various representations in Israel and in Diaspora. In the short term, the emphasis was on punishing the collaborators and discovering heroic cases of armed resistance: situations when the victims abandoned physical passivity and confronted their persecutors. In the historiography and public commemoration of early post-war decades, there was a need for victims to construct this concept of armed resistance. Armed resistance to brutal persecutors had been greatly valued across the history; Western societies found little value in helpless victims, and a passive attitude could not have been held as exemplary in the vast nation building process many of the survivors became part of. Often, the rhetoric of armed struggle and resistance became a leitmotif of survivors' autobiographical writings. Related to the concept of resistance, the themes of cooperation and collaboration with the Nazis/Fascists were also sensitive and controversial issues in the postwar period. Indeed, during that time Europe was swept by various policies of retribution that targeted not only the gentile perpetrators, but also the gentile and Jewish collaborators. Afraid of the possible retribution for their activ-

---

[1] Leo SCHADACH, *Orășelul*…cit., pp. 176-177.

[2] Those who were born in Palestine and did not make Aliya to Israel were considered to pose certain physical and psychological characteristics and were used in the Israeli imagery as the ideal inhabitants of the Jewish homeland. For more details on Sabra, see Oz ALMOG, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, California University Press, Berkeley, 2000.

[3] Of course, to that result greatly contributed the Israeli policies of mass education and commemoration concerning the Holocaust. For a critical perspective over the perceptions (and relations) of the Sabra inhabitants of Yshuv and later Israel towards the Holocaust survivors who immigrated in the first decades after the Holocaust, see the book of Tom SEGHEV, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, Holt Paperbacks, New York, 2000.

ity during Holocaust, some survivors, especially former community leaders, tried to avoid being labeled as Nazi/Fascist collaborators, and besides other defensive strategies, over-emphasized the resistance features of their WWII behavior.

With the passing of time, the general attitude toward the meaning of armed resistance, cooperation, and/or collaboration gradually changed. It started to show more understanding to the complex reality of living under Nazi sphere of influence as Jews and the difficult choices they faced. Besides armed struggle, other types of responses such as rescue, spiritual resistance, communal help, cultural activities, and smuggling food became part of the much broader notion of resistance. At the same time, the politics of retribution for perpetration and collaboration with the Nazis/Fascists softened part of the general effort to reintegrate former perpetrators and collaborationists. This allowed local societies to now orient themselves toward inclusion, reconstruction, and the development of a "brighter future".